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Trucks move 410,000 tons of rock a day from the 92-year-old Bingham Canyon copper mine — 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

## Old Bingham Mine Keeps Getting a New Lease on Life

Expected to last 20 more years 70 years ago, the open pit now may see another 20 years of production

BY PAT BEAN

STANDARD-EXAMINER

**BINGHAM CANYON** — For more than nine decades, workers have moved some 5 billion tons of earth, turning a mountain into the vast, 2½-mile-wide, half-mile-deep crater.

Like clockwork, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, trucks move 410,000 tons of rock a day from the Bingham Canyon copper mine.

The 92-year-old operation has earned a place on the National Historic Site registry and draws more than 200,000 visitors annually. From the visitors center, about 800 feet below the crest of the pit, the shovels, trucks and train cars look like sandbox toys.

Between April and October, fascinated gawkers can view the concentric terraced operation from within the hole itself.

Now the communities — and the mountain — exist only in memories and in faded black and white photographs.

Bingham Canyon's total yield far exceeds the yields of the Comstock Lode, Klondike and

California gold rushes combined, producing some 15 million tons of copper, 18 million ounces of gold, 157 million ounces of silver and 610 pounds of molybdenum since open-pit operations began in 1906.

But well before that — as early as 1863 — miners were tunneling into the mountainside.

"There was once thousands of miles of tunnels in the mountain. We occasionally still hit one of the remnants," said Kennecott spokesman Louie Cononelos.

Bingham Canyon is named after Thomas and Sanford Bingham, early Mormon settlers who in 1848 envisioned the canyon as an ideal place to raise cattle and horses and cut timber.

But in 1863, Col. Patrick Connor, who was stationed at Fort Douglas, sent soldiers, including ex-miners, to survey the area. When they reported that the area was rich in minerals, including copper, gold and silver, Connor organized the area as a mining district.

Cononelos said because Brigham Young wanted to keep his flock of Mormon settlers an agrarian, communal society, the mining op-

erations were left to gentile migrants.

The rich ore deposits, including rare porphyry deposits of copper, were depleted early on. Today, Kennecott works with ore deposits that contain only 0.6 percent copper. It takes one ton of ore to produce 12 pounds of copper, Cononelos said.

Even so, Kennecott Utah Copper produces 310,000 tons of refined copper annually and provides the United States with 15 percent of all the copper it consumes.

Because of the costs of extracting low-grade ore, Cononelos said that when his grandfather first went to work for the mine, he was only expected to last another 20 years.

"Because of better and better technology, I still had a 20-year life expectancy when my father went to work for the mine, and then I had a 20-year life expectancy when I went to work for the company in 1967," Cononelos said. "Today, the mine still has a 20-year life expectancy."

In 20 years, Cononelos said, the mine could be close to a mile deep.